

Peer Assistance and Leadership

Brief Program Description

The Peer Assistance and Leadership (PAL[®]) program began in 1980, in one Austin, Texas high school. It has since evolved into a nationally recognized program. As of 2000, over 25,000 students and over 5,000 teachers and administrators throughout 350 Texas school districts have participated in the PAL program. School districts in five other states have also implemented the PAL program.

Program Intervention

PAL curriculum and training are designed to meet the standards and ethics for effective peer programs as set by the National Peer Helpers Association.

The types of peer assistance offered in PAL include the following: group and one-to-one peer tutoring and mentoring; facilitating activities and group discussions on issues such as alcohol and substance use, and career choices; providing peer mediation and conflict resolution services; developing and participating in community service projects; developing communication, decision-making, and problem-solving skills.

PALs lead ten curriculum modules that contain objectives and activities. Two types of PAL programs exist—those that meet in classrooms during regular school hours and those structured as clubs in which PALS meet before school, after school or during lunch. Virtually all high school programs are structured as classes, roughly half of middle school programs are structured as classes and half are clubs, and all elementary school programs operate as clubs. The classes meet as often as other regularly scheduled classes—two to five times a week for 45 to 90 minutes during an entire school year. Clubs meet two to eight times a month for an entire school year.

Target Group

The target population is two fold: the students selected and trained to serve as peer helpers (PALs) and the students with whom they work (PALees). The PAL curriculum was initially developed for high school students. It has since expanded to include middle school and elementary school students. The PALs undergo a rigorous selection process. Incentives for PALs include the provision for juniors and seniors to receive elective credit toward high school graduation in Texas; recognition as a campus leader and role model; increased personal human relation skills; service opportunities; and participation in annual youth conferences. PALees are generally in at-risk situations or exhibiting at-risk behaviors.

Program Objectives

Long term:

- Reduction of use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Short Term:

- *Individual and School Domains*—Improvements in school attendance and grades, reduction of discipline referrals, increased performance on standardized tests, improved attitude toward school.
- *Family Domain*—Improved responsibility, improved future planning, and improved behavior at home.

Dissemination Capacity

Training and Technical Assistance:

A two day PAL Initial Teacher Training is strongly recommended for individuals responsible for the operation of the PAL program. The registration fee is \$100 for individuals outside of Texas attending a training session in Texas. No fee is charged for Texas educators attending training sessions in Texas. PAL may provide a training session outside of Texas for the cost of \$850 a day plus travel expense.

The Initial Teacher Training is experiential and prepares the PAL teacher to implement the PAL program in conjunction with the PAL Teacher Manual. The Manual is included in a packet that is required for all training participants.

PAL offers technical assistance by conducting routine site visits to PAL schools, through a quarterly newsletter, and by being available via e-mail, fax, and a toll free telephone number. PAL also holds two annual conferences for PALs as well as additional training on special topics.

Program Materials

The PAL Packet is required for all schools implementing PAL. The packet is comprised of the PAL Teacher Manual, PAL Student Handbook and PAL informational video at a cost of \$149.

Evaluation Design

The evaluation was conducted during the 1996-97 school year by an independent entity to gather data and outcomes in three areas: academic performance in school and on standardized tests, classroom attendance and behavior, and the perception of parents and school administrators on program effectiveness. School records and standardized test scores were used to determine

academic performance, attendance, and behavior; parent and school administrator surveys were used to gauge perceived effectiveness of the PAL program.

The sample chosen included 31 schools assembled from 6 Texas school districts across the state that reflect diversity in geographic location, district size, and ethnic background. 26 schools participated with a total of 446 students. 71 percent were high schools, 11 percent were junior high/middle schools, and 18 percent were elementary schools. 53 percent of the sample were Hispanic, 30 percent were White, 14 percent were African American, and 1 percent were Asian. 48 faculty and administrators participated in the study as well as 302 parents.

The study was quasi-experimental with no control or comparison group. Comparison was accomplished by utilizing pre and post treatment data.

Findings From Outcome Evaluation Study Academic Year 1996-1997

- Pre-program overall GPA was 83.1 percent; post program overall GPA was 87.7 percent.
- Pre-program percent of students passing Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS): Math 50.1, Reading 69.2, Writing 71.7.
- Post-program percent of students passing Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS); Math 66.1, Reading 82.5, Writing 81.6.
- Pre-program student absences: 7.9; post-program student absences 3.3.
- Pre-program student disciplinary referrals: 1.3; post program disciplinary referrals .35.
- PAL®and PALee Parents overwhelmingly felt that PAL®made a positive impact on behavior at home, attitude toward school.

Contact Information

For indepth information on this program, please use the contact listed below.

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